

Connecting the disconnects between Practices, Energy Justice Visions and State Capacity in Africa

**Donnerstag, 28. Mai 2020, 10.00 - 11.30 Uhr,
via Online-Meeting**

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Vortrag im Rahmen der Zwischenevaluierung (Habilitation)

The recent enthusiasm for self-organised solar PV electrification in Africa is deemed the plausible remedy to striking injustices associated with dependencies on inefficient state-led, centralised systems. While the uptake of decentralised systems somehow mitigates energy injustice – especially for less-privileged groups or locations, the transition process, however, leads to the emergence of precautionary energy practices and unscrupulous energy brokers. Furthermore, higher energy output of centralised grids and frustrations with decentralised systems sometimes compel so-called ‘victims’ of unjust systems to engage services of invincible syndicates to access grid power illegally. Self-organised energy initiatives thus (re-)produce practices which are hidden from state oversight out of necessity. This suggests trade-offs between energy justice visions and intentional effects of state power/policies. Highlighting practices, energy justice, state capacity and their interlinkages in specific geographies reveals how the state, energy users and other actors slip into willy-nilly entanglements in complicated processes which produce even subtler forms of energy injustice. I draw on studies in Ghana and Kenya to illuminate crucial issues needing further research in energy geography studies.